

LOG BLOCK? ‘A’ GAP? WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

JUST LIKE A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, football has words and phrases all its own. Listening to NFL coaches or players talk about plays, situations or strategies can get complicated so here are some current offensive and defensive terms frequently used by those in the know. Where applicable, specific players have been included to help exemplify the play.

OFFENSE

- **“BREAK OFF” A PASS ROUTE:** An adjustment to a wide receiver’s route after the pocket breaks down and the quarterback is forced to scramble. After the QB is flushed from the pocket, the planned routes are often not viable options because passing lanes change. When this occurs, it is the receiver’s job to work his way into the quarterback’s line of vision and get open. “Break” refers to the receiver leaving his originally designated pattern. The big key to remember here is to avoid taking the route from the outside to the inside, which could force the QB to throw across his body.
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: ATLANTA WR PEERLESS PRICE & QB MICHAEL VICK** – *Vick is arguably the most athletically gifted QB in the game today. When he decides to leave his pocket, he routinely makes defenders miss. This gives Price the time to either break back towards Vick, fade towards the sideline or streak deep. He has the speed to beat his man and the hands to make even the toughest catches look routine.*
- **BUBBLE SCREEN:** A wide receiver lines up and drifts towards the sideline, receiving a quick pass from the quarterback. This presents the wideout with a one-on-one opportunity with a defensive back. If there are multiple receivers on the same side, one will attempt to block the man responsible for the first receiver. “Bubble” refers to the outward bow of the receiver’s path.
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: PHILADELPHIA WR TERRELL OWENS** – *His overwhelming size and strength make him the perfect candidate for bubble screens, allowing him to overpower or outmaneuver his opponent in space.*
- **JAILBREAK SCREEN:** (a.k.a. “MIDDLE” SCREEN) A quick pass designed to put offensive lineman in a position to open up a lane for a wide receiver up the middle of the field. After the snap of the ball, a WR sprints down the line of scrimmage towards the ball and receives a pass in position to follow his blockers. The nature of the play, with lineman and receivers a blur of activity, looks chaotic. Hence, “jailbreak.”
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: PITTSBURGH WR HINES WARD** – *A former running back at Georgia, Ward is tailor-made for this type of screen because he is shifty, fearless in a crowd and patient. Jailbreak screens often break late, requiring a degree of control by the receiver.*
- **INVERTED WISHBONE:** The game of football has evolved by leaps and bounds over the past century. One staple of a power rushing attack from the early days of college football was the wishbone, in which three running backs were featured – one two to three yards directly behind the QB and two equidistant apart at about five to six yards behind the guards. Since the formation resembled a ‘Y’ shape, it was called the wishbone. The modern incarnation of this formation switches the look, with two backs (fullback, H back or tight end types) lined up three yards behind the guards and one tailback lined up six yards straight behind the quarterback.
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: CAROLINA RBs STEPHEN DAVIS & DE SHAUN FOSTER** – *Davis’ and Foster’s downhill running styles were crucial to the Panthers’ run to Super Bowl XXXVIII. The inverted wishbone, which is a rare formation for defenses to see, gives two blocking backs a running start to clear the way for the tailback for plays up the middle ranging outward to off tackle runs.*

DEFENSE

- **‘A’ GAP RESPONSIBILITY:** Universal from the NFL down to the high school level is the system for labeling defensive gaps. The “A” gap refers to the space between the center and guard. Typically, defensive tackles or middle linebackers are saddled with “A” gap responsibility, which is crucial to containing the running game. The gaps are labeled outward in alphabetical order (“B” gap is between guard and tackle, etc.).
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: CAROLINA DT KRIS JENKINS** – *The 6-4, 335-pound Jenkins is the ideal ‘A’ gap player because of his immense size and lightning-quick reactions to the snap of the ball. This two-time Pro Bowl pick gives offensive coordinator nightmares because of his ability to split the “A” gap by timing the snap count, resulting in busted running plays and errant throws.*
- **COWBOY BLITZ:** Though it’s name might indicate otherwise, the Dallas Cowboys did not popularize this blitz. “Cowboy” is simply another way of representing the acronym “CB,” which stands for cornerback. A cowboy blitz gives a corner a free run to wreak havoc in the backfield and is difficult to pick up since it comes wide and fast.
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: DENVER CB CHAMP BAILEY** – *Blisteringly fast and aggressive, Bailey has always been dependable in run support as well as coverage. Giving him a free run from the edge just to break defensive tendencies gives offensive coordinators one more scheme to consider.*
- **LOCK COVERAGE:** (a.k.a. “MAN UNDER”) A defensive scheme in which two safeties divide the field into deep halves, while the cornerbacks and linebackers play man-to-man defense underneath. Popular on third and long or other obvious passing situations. The term comes from the underneath coverage “locking” on one receiver each.
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: CHICAGO LB BRIAN URLACHER & FS MIKE BROWN** – *Arguably the most athletic middle linebacker ever to play the position, Urlacher’s speed allows him to be effective in man-to-man schemes like lock. Brown has a nose for the ball and always seems to be in the right position to make a play; new head coach LOVIE SMITH should be worry free with Brown patrolling his own deep half.*
- **“GHOST” TECHNIQUE:** Since players and coaches use numbers to describe where a defensive player will position himself on the defensive line relative to the offense (a system designed by PAUL “BEAR” BRYANT), a ghost technique refers to a situation in which there is no tight end. For instance, a seven technique calls for the DE to line up on the outside shoulder of the TE. If there is no tight end in the formation, the defensive player’s alignment is called a “ghost” seven because there is no actual player to use as a point of reference.
 - **PRIME EXAMPLE: INDIANAPOLIS DE DWIGHT FREENEY** – *Freeney is adept at applying pressure on the quarterback from the edge because of his speed and agility. Lining him up in a ghost seven gives him superior leverage on the tackle he is trying to outmaneuver.*